



# NEWS RELEASE

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**Contact:** Mark DeSio

**Phone:** (916) 654-5782

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **CALIFORNIA BECOMES 1st STATE IN THE COUNTRY TO TAKE OVER FEDERAL APPROVALS FOR TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS ON HIGHWAY SYSTEM**

**SACRAMENTO** - California this month became the first of five eligible states under the new federal SAFETEA-LU transportation bill to participate in a pilot program allowing Caltrans to take over the lead from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) for federal environmental approvals on transportation projects.

"This is another important piece of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's plan to streamline government and expedite completion of transportation projects," said Caltrans Director Will Kempton.

This is an historic step for California as it allows Caltrans to assume FHWA responsibilities for federal approvals under the National Environmental Policy Act and other national environmental laws for most highway projects in the state that are processed with an Environmental Impact Statement or Environmental Assessment. It also includes the ability to negotiate and respond to federal permitting and regulatory agencies directly. This should speed these exchanges and allow California to be more creative, effective and efficient in developing its approaches to transportation environmental issues.

"Allowing Caltrans to grant federal environmental approvals saves time by speeding up project production at a period when the construction program in California is at an all time high," according to Kempton.

The pilot program became effective on July 1 when the FHWA and Caltrans signed a memorandum of understanding detailing Caltrans' responsibilities under the program. Caltrans is required to comply with all federal environmental regulations and policies, maintaining FHWA's rigorous environmental protection standards.

Caltrans' assumption of federal responsibilities does not remove or change any federal environmental laws, regulations, or policies. Caltrans' staff of over 700 environmental professionals is well prepared to assume this role, according to Kempton. Over the past three decades, Caltrans has not only previously prepared numerous documents on behalf of FHWA, but also has implemented California's own comprehensive environmental regulations, through the California Environmental Quality Act.

More information is available at: [http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/env/nepa\\_pilot/index.htm](http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/env/nepa_pilot/index.htm)